

Israel Steps Up Its War on Mixed Marriages

David Sheen [The Electronic Intifada](#) 23 July 2018



Members of the Israeli anti-miscegenation group Lehava protest against the marriage of a Palestinian man and an Israeli Jewish woman in Rishon Letzion, 17 August 2014.

The Israeli government has long funded various efforts to try to prevent romantic relationships between Jews and non-Jews, both inside territories it controls and around the world.

But a new program confirmed this month by the tourism ministry takes Israel's war on families of mixed religion or ethnicity to a new level.

Israeli media reported on 10 July that in 2019, the government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will fund trips to the country for foreign Jews, with the express objective of participating in singles mixers on and around Tu B'Av, a day [celebrated by some](#) as the "Jewish Valentine's Day."

“Over the course of the events, young Jewish-Israelis and Jews that live in the diaspora will get to know one another, and that is likely to lead to couples forming,” [predicted](#) *Israel Hayom*, the pro-Netanyahu newspaper owned by casino billionaire, Republican financier and [anti-Palestinian donor](#) Sheldon Adelson.

“We’ll return to the glory days,” ruling Likud Party lawmaker Sharren Haskel told the paper. “Young [Jewish] men and women from all over the world will arrive and form relationships with local young men and women, in order to prevent assimilation and strengthen the connection to Judaism.”

Haskel used a Hebrew word that literally translates as “assimilation,” but that in modern Hebrew is commonly used as a euphemism for miscegenation – romantic relationships and procreation between Jews and non-Jews.

Haskel [recently toured](#) the al-Aqsa mosque compound along with [Uri Ariel](#), a cabinet minister and leading figure in the Jewish extremist movement that [supports the destruction](#) of the Dome of the Rock and al-Aqsa mosque in order to replace them with a Jewish temple.

Israeli governments past and present have spent enormous sums subsidizing trips to the country for young Jews from abroad.

Between 2010 and 2015 alone, the government gave [more than \\$250 million](#) to the largest provider of such trips, [Birthright Israel](#).

Adelson himself donated \$40 million to Birthright in 2015.

“Free sex vacation to Israel”

The primary purpose of the program is fostering Zionist commitment and eventual emigration by young Jews, but the trips also aim to encourage young Jews to have sexual relations with one another, hoping this will sour them on romantic relationships with non-Jewish people back in their home countries.

Birthright's promotion of relationships between tour participants – and between participants and Israeli tour staff – is not explicitly cited in its official publications.

But it is nonetheless widely acknowledged.

In April, Birthright participants [told Sarah Seltzer](#), a reporter with The Investigative Fund, about how “the combination of hook-up pressure, spring-break partying and romanticization of planned encounters between Israeli soldiers and American women” creates “a pervasive environment of sexual pressure that encourages Jews to meet, marry and, someday, procreate with other Jews.”

In the experience of one young woman profiled by Seltzer, that pressure contributed to an alleged sexual assault perpetrated against her during a Birthright trip by an Israeli soldier.

A writer for *Vice* who went on Birthright [called](#) it a “free sex vacation to Israel” and an “all-expenses-paid orgy in the desert,” sponsored by the Israeli government in the hope that “young Semites will meet, marry and procreate, yielding little mini Jews.”

Other have also [mocked the trips](#) for sponsoring “22-year-olds to go to the Middle East, get totally drunk and have sex with everyone.”

And in 2013, Birthright benefactor Sheldon Adelson himself [told](#) an assembled audience of young participants: “I hope you’ve all been doing the hanky-panky.”

Dispensing with the pretense

But the new Tu B’Av trips promoted by Haskel dispense with pretense: the initiative’s authors openly admit that their main objective is to encourage Jews to form romantic relationships with other Jews and to steer clear of non-Jews.

Israel Hayom reported that the trips would include “wine tastings and camping in vineyards across the country,” to which local Israeli Jews would also be invited.

The mixers will feature singing and dancing events dubbed “Returning to the Palmach and the Irgun” – a reference to two Zionist militias that participated in the 1948 Nakba, the ethnic cleansing of more than 750,000 Palestinians.

The Irgun is [particularly notorious](#) for the massacre of Palestinian civilians in the village of [Deir Yassin](#) in 1948 and for the [bombing of the King David Hotel](#) two years earlier.

Israel Hayom does not say how organizers would ensure that attendance would be restricted to Jews, and forbidden to Palestinian citizens of Israel, African refugees and other non-Jewish single men and women.

However, given the highly segregated reality within Israel, this should not be difficult.

No mixed marriages

Israeli law records religious designations for each of its citizens and it does not permit couples registered under different religions to legally marry one another.

The state does, however, retroactively recognize wedding ceremonies performed for such couples in other countries.

Statisticians estimate that [as many as one in 10 marriages](#) in Israel are between persons from different groups.

However, non-Jewish spouses – especially if they are from African states – often face deliberate obstacles from the government to their entry or residency.

In recent years, Israeli government attacks on mixed relationships, within Israel and without, have been led by the far-right [Jewish Home party](#) and its leader [Naftali Bennett](#).

During Bennett’s time as education minister, Israel has stripped from its recommended reading lists for high school students books about mixed relationships.

In 2015, it removed [Borderlife](#), about a romance between a Jewish woman and a Palestinian man, and in 2016, it removed [Trumpet in the Wadi](#), about a romance between a Jewish man and a Palestinian woman.

Bennett's education ministry also funds groups of religious Jews to move into the few mixed neighborhoods that still exist in the country – where Jews and Palestinians live alongside one another as unequal citizens, but in relative coexistence.

There, the new arrivals [incite against local mixed families](#) and have distributed leaflets warning that “there are mixed marriages in almost every building in Jaffa” and exhorting residents to “strengthen Jewish identity.”

Groups like [Lehava](#) recruit teens and adults to patrol Israeli towns and public beaches, where they harass mixed couples. They also [protest Jewish-Palestinian wedding ceremonies](#) with chants of “Death to the Arabs!”

In 2014, three [Lehava members torched](#) the only school in the Jerusalem area with instruction in both Hebrew and Arabic, daubing the walls with slogans including “End miscegenation” and “No coexistence with cancer.”

The three received sentences of about [three years in prison](#).

Fighting mixed marriages abroad

In his other role as minister of diaspora affairs, Bennett funnels money to programs aimed at stamping out relationships between Jews and non-Jews overseas as well.

When Bennett took over the diaspora affairs ministry in 2013, its [budget from the government](#) was about \$8 million a year.

Now Bennett is [talking about](#) spending \$1 billion annually on projects around the world described as promoting “the future of the Jewish people.”

In June 2016, Bennett told a committee of the Knesset, Israel's parliament, that the marriage of Jews to non-Jews in modern times is a [disaster](#) on par with four other tragedies of Jewish history, including the Nazi Holocaust.

Five months later, two young Israelis [beat to death](#) Sudanese asylum-seeker Babikir Adham-Uvdo in a Tel Aviv suburb.

Angered that a non-Jewish Black man had stopped to talk to a group of young Israeli Jewish women, the killers crushed his face so badly that his own brother was unable to recognize him.

In February, one of Adham-Uvdo's killers received a maximum jail sentence of 10 years for manslaughter, in a [plea bargain](#), although he will probably be released in just a few years.

Sentencing of the other killer, a minor at the time of the incident, has yet to be determined.

“A plague”

Trying to win political points by bashing mixed relationships is not exclusive to right-wing parties in Israel.

In a televised interview in Hebrew in June, [Isaac Herzog](#), the former leader of Israel's ostensibly left-wing Zionist Union and Labor parties, [called](#) mixed families “[a plague](#)” for which he hoped to find “a solution.”

The noxious comments came on the very day that Herzog was [chosen](#) as the next leader of the [Jewish Agency](#), the state-backed organization that prior to the Nakba led Zionist efforts to colonize Palestine.

On the same day, Herzog also headed to Jerusalem to pay his respects to Israel's Sephardic Chief Rabbi [Yitzhak Yosef](#) – a powerful religious official with a long history of [racist statements](#).

There, Israeli media reported, Herzog [thanked Yosef](#) for his personal blessing, which included an instruction to “defend the Jewish people from assimilation.”

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